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ABSTRACT

To circumvent isolationism, ethnocentrism, and intolerance experienced by culturally diverse students and their parents in U.S. schools, education policies must be effectively documented with methodological endorsement of multicultural education as policy for all students to be personally meaningful, socially relevant, culturally accurate, and educationally sound. Education policy development must start from within the culture of the school rather than be imposed from the outside. It should include social resources to mediate the relationship between new ideas and old practices. Working definitions of culture, multicultural education, and cultural pluralism are necessary in understanding the many implications for educational practice and comprehensive reform in U.S. schools. Multicultural education is an ongoing process. It is also a reform movement that is trying to change schools to provide equal opportunities for all students. Teachers must examine their own attitudes and be trained to appreciate diversity. Standardized testing, which does not take into account cultural differences, must be replaced with culturally fair methods of assessing students' behavior and knowledge. Cultural pluralism as a national ideal can be realized through multicultural education and comprehensive school reform. (Contains 12 references.) (SM)

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Cultural Pluralism: Implications for Educational Practices and Comprehensive School Reform

by:
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Paper presented at Kappa Delta Pi's *43rd Biennial Convocation*
(Orlando, FL, November 2001)

Introduction

As gates are opening to our nation's future, it is incumbent upon all Americans to acknowledge the fact that remarkable advances in telecommunication, biotechnology, and technology, increased integration of markets, and the emergence of new political alliances have prompted unprecedented demographic shifts of previously isolated peoples who have been brought together. Ayton-Shenker (1995) stated that while current tremendous global transition has ensued and confluence of peoples and cultures has initiated the process of adjustment to pluralism, many social problems of confusion, tension, and conflict have been created. The apparent solution to these problems has been an understandable urge to return to old conventions, traditional cultures, fundamental values, and the familiar, seemingly secure, sense of one's identity. Amidst the turmoil of tradition, people may resort to isolationism, ethnocentricism, and intolerance.

To circumvent isolationism, ethnocentricism, and intolerance by culturally diverse students and their parents in our nation's schools, education policies must be effectively documented with methodical endorsement of multicultural education as policy for all students to be personally meaningful, socially relevant, culturally accurate, and educationally sound (Banks & Banks, 1993). Education policy development must also start from within the culture of the school rather than be imposed from the outside. Education policy development should also include social resources to mediate the relationship between new ideas and old practices (Mehan, 1991).

Definition of Culture, Multicultural Education, and Cultural Pluralism

A working definition of culture, multicultural education, and cultural pluralism, are necessary in understanding the many implications for educational practices and comprehensive reform in our nation's schools. An updated definition of culture focuses on shared knowledge and belief systems that shape human perceptions and generate social behavior. This definition is more attuned to the definition of multicultural education as the development of multiple standards for perceiving, believing, doing, and evaluating (Gibson, 1984), rather than the typical culture definition's sole focus on habits and behavior.

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Bennett (1995) defined multicultural education as an approach to teaching and learning based upon democratic values and beliefs, and seeks to foster cultural pluralism within culturally diverse societies and an interdependent world. A comprehensive definition of multicultural education includes four dimensions: (1) movement toward equity, (2) multicultural curriculum approach, (3) process of becoming multicultural, and (4) commitment to combat prejudice and discrimination. Hall (1981) used a working definition of culture as "a series of situational models for behavior and thought". Hall stated that the cultural models that anthropologists use are frequently highly abstract versions of parts of models that make up the entire culture, like kinship systems for example. There is not one aspect of life that goes untouched or unaltered by culture, and Hall maintained that culture continues to be outlined as "man's medium". Many aspects of human actions and interactions that are frequently the most obvious, taken-for-granted, and the least studied are what determine culture. Some of these aspects of culture include personality, communication techniques—expression of human emotions, thought processes, human movement, problem solving, city planning and layout, and the function and organization of transportation, economic, and government systems. Hall contended that these aspects of culture "influence behavior in the deepest and most subtle ways".

Banks (1988) stated that in the early years of the twentieth century, the call for cultural pluralism was a cry in the wilderness, because cultural pluralists' arguments were largely ignored. These cultural pluralists included a few philosophers and writers, such as Horace Kallen, Randolph Borne, and Julius Drachsler. Their arguments strongly defended the rights of immigrants living in the United States. They rejected the assimilationist premise of leaders such as Elwood Patterson Cubberly with the so-called "melting pot" argument. Cultural pluralists argued for the right of thousands of Southern, Eastern, and Central European immigrant groups to maintain their ethnic cultures and institutions in American society, because they thought that a political democracy must also be a cultural democracy. Cultural pluralists maintained, through their "salad bowl" argument, that each ethnic culture would play a unique role in American society but would also contribute to the total society, because American civilization would be enriched by diverse ethnic cultures. They termed their position *cultural pluralism* and deemed it necessary to guide public and educational practices.

Educational Practices

Multicultural education has been referred to as an ideal, a concept, a process, and an educational reform movement (Banks, 1988; Bennett, 1995; Parla, 1994). Banks (1988) stated that multicultural education is a reform movement designed to make some major changes in the education of children and youths so that all students, regardless of their gender, social class, ethnicity, or race, have equal opportunities to learn in school. Parla (1994) stated that multicultural education is also a reform movement that is trying to change schools so that these equal opportunities exist for all students. Parla also thought that multicultural education is an on-going process, with goals that would never fully be

realized, but an ideal for which all must constantly strive. According to most multicultural education advocates, many school practices related to race and ethnicity are harmful to students and reinforce many ethnic stereotypes and discriminatory practices in Western societies. Banks thought that two assumptions included in multicultural education are: (a) ethnicity is a salient part of the United States and other Western societies, and (b) ethnic diversity is a positive element in a society because it enriches a nation and increases the ways in which its citizens can perceive and solve personal and public problems. More opportunities are provided individuals to experience other cultures and thus become more fulfilled human beings with the enrichment of ethnic diversity. Bennett (1995) stated that the major goal of multicultural education is the development of the intellectual, social, and personal growth of all students to their highest potential. When students are allowed participation in cultural diversity, they are more capable of benefiting from the total human experience.

Parla (1994) offered five distinct purposes of multicultural education:

1. Enhance higher-order thinking and problem solving skills to increase academic performance of all students.
2. Increase awareness and knowledge of the history, culture, and perspectives of all ethnic and racial groups in the United States, and eventually, the world. [This includes ALL groups, e.g., early immigrants such as English, Irish, among others; and non-immigrants such as Puerto-Ricans, Cubans, Vietnamese, African-Americans, Native Americans, and others].
3. Enhance students' self-esteem, self-awareness, and identity.
4. Promote the valuing of cultural differences so that they are viewed in an egalitarian mode rather than in an inferior/superior mode. To identify differences, commonalities must be identified.
5. Develop the understanding of the multicultural nation and independent world.

Henry (1995) developed the "Cultural Diversity Awareness Inventory" (CDAI) in 1986, a self-administered questionnaire designed to examine attitudes of educators toward young culturally diverse children and their families. Twenty-eight opinion statements addressed general cultural awareness and included a Likert-type five-point scale. In 1995, Henry conducted a research project to determine the reliability and validity of the CDAI. The research addressed a pressing need in the multicultural education movement. School districts in Texas and school divisions in Virginia were targeted as the sample population because of the diversity in the ethnic student population. The total number of participants who completed and returned the inventories to complete data analysis was 506. Henry presented evidence of reliability and validity of the CDAI. Results of Cronback's test for internal consistency reliability evidenced an overall alpha coefficient of .90. Test-retest was used for assessing reliability and was established at the .66 level. Content validity was appraised by a panel of experts for clarity and significance of each statement. To establish construct validity, Henry converted and processed quantitative data into computer records. Educator comparisons were made between ethnic groups, age groups, years of experience, grade levels, and types of classes taught.

From Henry's research findings, three specific suggestions for educational practice were cited:

1. Since teachers' attitudes affect their behavior toward particular cultural groups, effective staff developers may need to consider the characteristics of their faculty when making decisions about professional development workshops.
2. A teacher's ethnicity may be a reason for their attitudes toward children with culturally diverse backgrounds, but larger samples are needed from the Hispanic American, Native American, and Other American groups before any firm conclusions can be drawn about the effect of teacher ethnicity or teacher attitudes. There does not seem to be any difference in attitudes between teachers with BA or MA degrees.
3. An instrument, such as the CDAI, which measures teachers' attitudes toward children with culturally diverse backgrounds may be useful in helping persons plan staff development.

Henry (1995) thought that with the national and state focus on accountability in education, an assessment should be available which examined educational practitioners attitudes toward cultural diversity.

Comprehensive School Reform

Changes brought about by the 2001 education reform plan and approved by our nation's legislative policymakers will inevitably touch nearly every American public school classroom. Some of these changes include: (a) increasing the frequency of standardized tests for most students, and (b) requiring school districts to disaggregate and publicize the data results by race, gender, and socioeconomic group. Having direct access to such data, parents, communities, and stakeholders will be able to hold schools accountable for the provision of a quality education for all students. Our legislators require that a wide range of culturally diverse groups show progress on standardized tests for a school to be deemed successful. Developing accountability provisions that are rational, valid, and reliable is the dilemma posed by these mandated changes. A system must also be developed and implemented that will not create chaos but will effectively result in improvement.

One way to assure that a newly developed and constructed accountability system meet the required demand to ultimately become a successful endeavor is to seriously consider student test performance and educational placement linked to cross-cultural communication. Taylor (1987) reported that nearly all standardized tests administered in schools and classrooms require students to manipulate information through communication tools. Many authors of standardized tests often presume that all students taking the tests are proficient in Standard English and in the rules of communication for the educated segment of society. Test bias and culturally fair methods for assessing students' behavior and knowledge have been the focus and discussion of many research studies in the last decade. Accordingly, the use of culturally discriminatory test and assessment procedures has been prohibited through court cases and legislative initiatives,

e.g., Public Law 94.142: the Education for All Handicapped Children Act.

Teachers, standardized test authors, and examiners, should be attentive to seven major sources of test and assessment bias. They are: (1) situational bias, (2) directions bias, (3) value bias, (4) linguistic bias, (5) format bias, (6) cultural misinterpretation, and (7) stimulus bias. Two examples of cultural misinterpretation is that of the examiner erroneously interpreting cultural practices of the examinee, e.g., a child who exhibits silence as a natural reaction to an unfamiliar adult examiner is diagnosed as nonverbal, or a child who does not respond quickly to test items is labeled unknowledgeable. Teachers must always be aware of how students' individual communicative factors can influence their performance on standardized tests.

Teachers cannot be expected to develop their own culturally fair tests, but standardized test authors must be expected to do so because of the nation's current school accountability movement and reform issues. Teachers can contribute to a more positive assessment environment for culturally diverse students in their classrooms. Taylor and Payne (1983) reported that teachers could address the assessment bias issue in the following ways:

- Ensure that all students understand the test directions.
- Ensure that the test does not presume linguistic knowledge that students may not have unless, of course, the test is designed to assess knowledge of a specific language or dialect.
- The test should not require students to articulate values that they do not share.
- The test should be compatible with the preferred learning styles of the student.
- Situational and interactional constraints must be considered from a cultural perspective in evaluating oral communication behavior on tests.
- In the scoring or interpretation of test performance, the student's response style must be considered.
- When referring students for special testing or placement in special education, be certain that results of evaluations are not flawed by cultural differences in behavior and language.
- Do not include culturally discriminatory items on tests.
- Accept as correct those test answers that are considered valid within the student's culture, even if the particular answer is not listed in the manual as being correct.
- Consider two scores for tests which have a cultural component, a culturally unadjusted score and a culturally adjusted score.
- Support efforts to decrease reliance on standardized tests for assessments, using alternative assessment procedures where possible and appropriate.
- Support efforts to involve parents and the community in assessing test findings.

Until new culturally valid standardized tests and assessment procedures are available and are published as being culturally valid in particular technical evaluation reviews, teachers should be skeptical of most standardized test results administered to culturally and

linguistically diverse students. Teachers should exercise caution in using these results for making placement decisions, and stakeholders and policymakers should also exercise caution in using the results to determine overall school success.

Conclusion

An imaginative supporter of cultural pluralism, Randolph Bourne, (1916) wrote: "Let us face realistically the America we have around us. Let us work with the forces that are at work. Let us make something of this trans-national spirit instead of outlawing it. Already we are living this cosmopolitan America. What we need is everywhere a vivid consciousness of the new ideal. Deliberate headway must be made against the survivals of the melting-pot ideal for the promise of American life.

... All our idealisms must be those of future social goals which all can participate, the good life of personality lived in the environment of the Beloved Community. No mere doubtful triumphs of the past, which redound to the glory of only one of our trans-nationalities, can satisfy us. It must be a future America, on which all can unite which pulls us irresistibly toward it, as we understand each other more warmly."

Cultural pluralism as a national ideal can be successfully realized through multicultural education and comprehensive school reform. A prerequisite for understanding other cultures is that of understanding the necessity of transcending the limits of individual cultures. Hall (1981) thought that to "transcend the limits of individual cultures", and to extend personal cultural insights, one must agree to his or her participation in democratic social change. This democratic social change can only take place through the recognition and acceptance of multiple hidden dimensions of other unique forms of unconscious culture. Active participation in democratic social change will inevitably become an initial forward movement toward an astute cross-cultural sensitivity and understanding, first in our nation's schools, and then optimistically in our nation to affect a strengthened nation.

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